

antecedent: the word, phrase, or clause to which a pronoun refers. It is understood by the context and is clearly identifiable.

Examples:

(antecedents and pronouns are bolded)

The critique of Plato's **Republic** was written from a contemporary point of view. **It** was an in-depth analysis of Plato's opinions about possible governmental forms.

The boy who pitched the game is worn out.

If you need **one**, there's **a towel** in the top drawer.

The antecedent of a pronoun is the **word which** the pronoun stands for.

In the above examples, the antecedent precedes the relative pronoun directly. In English this is not always the case:

A situation has arisen **that** calls for immediate action.

While the pronouns *I* and *you* can be replaced by nouns, the context of a sentence does not always require the nouns to make clear to which persons *I* and *you* refer. However, the third person pronouns (*he*, *she*, *it*, *they*) almost always derive their meaning from their antecedents or the words for which they stand.

Consider this:

Michelle told Ruth that **she** would take Jerry to the barn dance.

It is not clear whether the pronoun **she** in this sentence refers to Ruth or Michelle.

Additional examples:

In chapter four of my autobiography **it** says that I was born out of wedlock.

It is not clear what is referred to by the pronoun **it**. To make the reference more clear, change the sentence to:

Chapter four of my autobiography states that I was born out of wedlock.

In the restaurant **they** gave me someone else's linguini.

It is not clear what is referred by the pronoun **they**. To make the reference more clear, change the sentence to:

In the restaurant, **the server** gave me someone else's linguini.

A pronoun must agree with its antecedent in three ways:

1. person – the quality of being

Example:

Incorrect: If **a person** wants to succeed in corporate life, **you** have to know the rules of the game.

The antecedent, **a person** (third person), and the pronoun, **you** (second person), do not yield agreement in person.

Correct: If **a person** wants to succeed in corporate life, **he or she** has to know the rules of the game. (third person agreement)
or
If **you** want to succeed in corporate life, **you** have to know the rules of the game. (second person agreement)

2. number – the quality that distinguishes between singular and plural

Example:

Incorrect: If **anybody** wants to succeed in corporate life, **they** have to know the rules of the game.

The antecedent, **anybody** (third person singular), and the pronoun, **they** (third person plural), do not yield agreement in number.

Correct: If **people** want to succeed in corporate life, **they** have to know the rules of the game. (third person plural)
or
If **anybody** wants to succeed in corporate life, **he or she** has to know the rules of the game. (third person singular)

3. gender – the quality that distinguishes masculine or feminine

Example:

Incorrect: If **a person** wants to succeed in corporate life, **he** has to know the rules of the game.

The antecedent, **a person** (third person neutral singular), and the pronoun, **he** (third person masculine singular), do not yield agreement in gender.

Correct: If **a person** wants to succeed in corporate life, **he or she** has to know the rules of the game. (third person neutral singular)
or
If **people** want to succeed in corporate life, **they** have to know the rules of the game. (third person neutral plural)

<http://www.sil.org/linguistics/GlossaryOfLinguisticTerms/WhatIsAnAntecedent.htm>
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antecedent_%28grammar%29
<http://leo.stcloudstate.edu/grammar/pronante.html>
<http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/pronouns.htm>
<http://www.uottawa.ca/academic/arts/writcent/hypergrammar/pronref.html>
<https://mit.imoat.net/handbook/pro-ante.htm>